Challenges

Despite many successes, some significant challenges face the Society. The voluntary status of the Executive, and the pressures of today’s tertiary environment, have meant that some services to members which had been planned have not been realised. A possible solution is to restructure the Executive to expand its size, so that the workload is spread more widely.

An alternative solution is to increase the funding base to the Society, so that an executive officer can be employed. The funding base can be increased either by sponsorship (which requires specialist, non-academic skills) or by increasing membership.

Thoughts of increasing membership raise another dilemma for the Society. Over the last few years, the scholarship of teaching and learning with technology has become increasingly mature. Having a paper in educational technology in their daily working life.

During 2000, approximately 40 members have been taking part in 20 evaluation studies (supported by mentors) as part of this project, and 18 of the initial 20 studies are likely to lead to significant scholarly outcomes.

President’s Message

The report signals the end, for me, of four years as President, and eight years on the Executive of ASCILITE. During the last four years, membership has increased from 231 to 419, and the Society has taken an increasingly international focus, with a change in name from ‘Australian’ to ‘Australasian’, and members in 13 countries. Approximately one eighth of our members are now from outside Australia.

I feel confident that ASCILITE is in a strong position to move forward under a new leadership. It is time for new blood, and new directions. Indeed, this is inevitable, with a large turnover in Executive members this year. I am sure they will find being a member of the ASCILITE Executive a fulfilling experience. I know I did. I will have enduring memories of the freely-flowing ideas and ego-less nature of executive members I have worked with over the last eight years – it has been a most enjoyable experience!

Rob Phillips

Executive Members

President

Rob Phillips

Murdungh University

Helen Carter

University of Wollongong

Russ Penell

University of Western Sydney

Bill Chia

University of Western Sydney

Jenny Winn

Private Consultant

Beth Caddigan

University of Queensland

Camell McNaught

RMIT University

Allan Christie

NetSpot Pty. Ltd

Carmel McNaught

RMIT University

Cathy Gunn

University of Auckland

The Executive was admirably assisted in its work by Stacey Denniss at the Secretariat, from CEDIR at the University of Wollongong and Carole Evans as Executive Assistant from TEDS at the University of Queensland. The Society acknowledges the contribution of both institutions, particularly TEDS, who sponsored Carole’s availability.

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Historical Overview
During the last four years, the Society has achieved many things, in a climate of reduced funding and increasing workload for tertiary education staff.

- Through an alliance with the Australian Society for Educational Technology (ASET) in 1997, ASCILITE became the new name for the Australian Society for Educational Technology in 1997, ASCILITE e-invigorated the Australian Journal of Educational Technology (AJET) with the editorial guidance of Ron Oliver and Roger Atkinson, AJET has significantly increased the volume and quality of its papers.
- Since 1996, each ASCILITE conference has attracted over 200 attendees, and returned over $20,000 to the Society, their easy keeping, membership fees low, and our financial position strong.
- ASCILITE has increased its profile in policy-making circles, primarily in Australia, through contributions to government-funded activities:
  - ASCILITE produced a report under the Government's request to support the adoption of Computer-facilitated Learning and Support Materials in Australian Universities.
- During 2000, ASCILITE has been working on an Australian Government-funded Staff development programme in 'Evaluation of Technology-based Teaching Development Projects', funded by the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD).
- ASCILITE has been at the cutting edge of electronic communications with its members, with email communications starting in 1994, and the first conference papers appearing on the web in 1995.
- The ASCILITE Virtual Conferencing System is a powerful full database-driven communication tool, which is just starting to be used to its fullest potential.
- We have also established an affiliation with the UK-based Association for Learning Technology.

Membership
Of the Society’s 419 members, 368 come from Australia, but the remaining eighth of the members originate from other countries, as shown in Table 1. The Australian membership is heavily concentrated in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, as shown in Table 2. The incoming Executive may wish to direct special recruiting effort into the under-represented states and territories, as well improving membership from New Zealand.

Table 1. Membership by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
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<td>South Africa</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>United States of America</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>419</strong></td>
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Table 2. Australian membership broken down by state and territory

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>126</td>
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<td>NT</td>
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<td>QLD</td>
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<td>SA</td>
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Online Services
ASCILITE has provided online communication for members since 1994, with all conference proceedings since 1995 online. This has now evolved into a sophisticated Virtual Conferencing System (VCS), developed by sponsor NetSpot Communications, directed by Adam Churin. During the last year, the usability of the VCS has been refined. The VCS has been an essential factor in the development of a community of learners as part of the ASCILITE CUTSD evaluation project, described elsewhere.

Substantial work has also been done on the ASCILITE Links Database, which will enable distributed management of discipline-specific collections of educational resources and links.

Monthly usage statistics for the ASCILITE website are publicly available at http://www.ascilite.org.au/stats/. This provides fine-grained data about usage of the site. Our conference proceedings remain popular with researchers and educators.

The ASCILITE website was substantially revamped during the year, thanks to the work of Bill Chua, Russ Pennell and Allan Christie and the NetSpot team. Both new and old members might be interested in the living history of the Society at http://www.ascilite.org.au/history.html.

Finances
The Society continues to enjoy a healthy financial position. Through the work of the Treasurer, Russ Pennell, and Stacey Denniss in the Secretariat, we have a well-oiled and responsive accounting system. Notably, long-standing accounting discrepancies were cleared up with the assistance of the Table 1.

The Australian membership is heavily concentrated in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, as shown in Table 2. The incoming Executive may wish to direct special recruiting effort into the under-represented states and territories, as well improving membership from New Zealand.

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1999-2000 Financial Statements
ASCILITE began the year with total equity of $64,273.51 and finished with $56,739.28 to record a loss of $7,534.23, made up of income $25,200.19 and expenses $32,734.42. Membership fees totalled a healthy $19,990, reducing our former dependence on Conference income.

The results for the financial year 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000 were distorted by the early arrival of the Conference surplus. The ASCILITE99 Conference held at QUT in December 1999 achieved a healthy surplus of $17,004, as well as repaying the $5000 loan we’d provided, but these amounts did not reach us till the end of August 2000. Consequently they are not included in our results for the year.

At the end of October 2000 equity had returned to the healthier figure of $69,303.27.

Australian GST Issues
The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in Australia in July 2000 imposed extra burdens on the Society, and the establishment of GST procedures took most of the year. A decision was made to register for GST, as it offers the Society a saving of approximately $4000pa. Accordingly, membership fees were increased by $7pa, (claimable as a tax deduction by members where applicable). Non-Australian members are not affected, as GST is not chargeable in this case.

ASCILITE Regional Activities
A new initiative for 2000 was the establishment of the ASCILITE Regional activities. This was a reincarnation of the ASCILITE Local Activities scheme which faded out due to lack of interest in the mid-1990’s. The regional activities were re-established due to a strong response from respondents to a survey as part of the draft marketing plan conducted in 1999.

The regional activities commenced with the sponsorship of the annual UniServe Science National Workshop (2000) in Sydney. The workshop, entitled “Evaluating the New Teaching Technologies”, was held on Friday 28 April, and was preceded by a half-day discussion forum on the first year experience.

Sponsorship was also given for the ASCILITE/AusWeb Road Show, which featured highlights from the AusWeb conferences. Keynote speakers, formal papers and tutorial/Workshops from the Cairns conference were presented again in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne.

A little further afield, ASCILITE President, Rob Phillips travelled to New Zealand in late May 2000, partly to promote ASCILITE in that country, and partly to take part in the conference of the University of Auckland’s Vice Chancellor’s Symposium on Flexible Learning, as a regional ASCILITE activity, while he was there. Rob also gave presentations and had informal discussions at Auckland University of Technology, Unitec Institute of Technology and Waikato Polytechnic.

Conferences
We are looking forward to the 2001 conference at the University of Melbourne, organised by Mike Keppell, Peter Hants, Gregor Kennedy and colleagues.

However, the 2002 conference will break new ground for ASCILITE, because it will mark our first conference outside Australia. It will be held at UniTeQ in Auckland. It will be a pleasure to have the conference hosted there by Alson Young and her team.

Over the last two or three years, the Executive has been developing a Conference Handbook. This handbook forms a living memory of how to organise a conference, and will be updated and refined on an ongoing basis, it might be possible to market this to other institutions as a guide for their conferences.

The online handbook at http://www.ascilite.org.au/confhbk/ contains:
- technical support for conferences
- policy and procedure covering the correct handling of monies taken as part of center, and will be updated and refined on an ongoing basis.
- paper refereeing procedures and guidelines.

In addition, Carmel McNaught presented a seminar in Melbourne, and wrote a ‘How to’ paper on preparing conference proceedings, to encourage non-academic members to submit papers. This came about because the existing reviewing processes seemingly favoured academic papers, possibly to the detriment of papers submitted by general staff, technical officers, etc. A fair percentage of ASCILITE members are not academics, and all should be given the chance to present their work at the conference, be it a full paper, poster or workshop. Review panels will be encouraged to include development people in the review process.